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TESTIMONY RE: S.B. NO. 1013 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING ACUTE CARE
HOSPITALS TO MAKE FORENSIC NURSING SERVICES AVAILABLE TO
PATIENTS

Public Health Committee Hearing

February 21, 2007

Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut. I am Dr. Mary Jane Williams, past-president of the Connecticut Nurses' Association, current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor and chair of nursing at the University of Hartford. I have practiced nursing for over 40 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut for 35 years. I am providing testimony in support of S.B. NO. 1013 (RAISED) AN ACT REQUIRING ACUTE CARE HOSPITALS TO MAKE FORENSIC NURSING SERVICES AVAILABLE TO PATIENTS.

The relatively new and evolving specialty of forensic nursing encompasses providing care to victims of crime, collecting evidence, and providing health care services within the prison system. (The International Association of Forensic Nurses). Because this specialty not only involves application of nursing practice to legal proceedings it also encompasses treatment of victims of trauma.

When a victim of trauma arrives at a hospital it becomes imperative that the retrieving and handling of evidence is meticulous in order to help make the best possible case. Nurses who have received training in the area of forensics are able to provide the necessary care and also lay the necessary groundwork for prosecution of the perpetrator.

Sexual assault is a violent act perpetrated on individuals who, as a result, are physically and emotionally traumatized. The examination not only involves a physical examination but excellent skills related to counseling. If an individual does not possess these skills they re-victimize the survivor. Forensic nurses have those skills and are also educated to collect all the relevant forensic evidence that is needed to prosecute the perpetrator. Evidence collection in sexual assault cases can be further traumatizing if the collector of evidence is unprepared and unaware of the pain it inflicts during the sampling. It is especially traumatizing when you have to collect the victim's hair samples (by the root) and clip fingernails. It is essential that it is done properly while still protecting the victim.

With the use of skilled and properly educated nurses the survivors will be assured a professional and less traumatizing experience, as well as the guarantee that the proper evidence will be collected uniformly in all sexual assault cases to enable prosecution and remove the perpetrator from the community.

We encourage the committee to support this bill to support the survivors in our midst.